

Noh Ama 海士 (海人)

(“The Diver”)

Minister Fusazaki goes to Shido Bay to find out the story of his mother, a diver, and to pray for her soul. There, he meets a woman who tells the story of how the diver retrieved the lost jewel from the Dragon Palace under the sea which enabled the diver’s son Fusazaki to eventually become a minister. The woman then reveals that she is the spirit of his mother, and disappears. The Minister arranges for a prayer ceremony to be held for her and she later returns in the form of a dragon princess, thanks him for his prayers, and dances.

Author: Unknown, though evidence indicates it is an old play and might have been written by the mid-14th century actor Komparu Gonnosuke.

Scene: Early spring, the Early Nara period (late 7th c.), Shido Bay in Sanuki province the present Shido in Kagawa prefecture, Shikoku.

Category: Fifth category ending (female dragon) play, phantom noh in two acts, banshiki hayamai (high-pitched quick dance) with taiko.

Performance practice: Performed by all schools with many variant performances. Written as 海士 in Kanze, and as 海人 in other schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Kokata (child actor): the minister Fujiwara no Fusazaki.
- Waki (secondary actor): a courtier under Fusazaki.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actor): 2-3 companion courtiers.
- Maejite (first half shite main actor): a woman diver, the spirit of Fusazaki’s mother. Wears a middle-aged woman (fukai or shakumi) mask.
- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actor): a villager.
- Nochijie (second half shite): the mother’s spirit in the form of a dragon princess. Wears a dragon-spirit (deigan) mask and headdress.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Kokata, Waki and Wakizure entrance: Minister Fusazaki enters with courtier to shidai music, announces himself, and says that they are headed for Shido Bay where his own mother has passed away. They sing a travel song in which they tell of departing Nara, crossing to Awaji island, and arriving at Shido.
2. Shite entrance: A woman diver enters to issei music carrying a sickle and twigs of cryptomeria to suggest seaweed. She says that she is a diver from the nearby hamlet of Amano. Unlike the more famous seafolk of Ise or of Suma, those of Shido Bay have no pleasures but merely must cut seaweed. She sings of reeds flowing out to sea and how people too, their labors finished, must pass away.

3. Waki and Shite exchange: The head courtier asks the woman to cut seaweed so the minister can see the moon’s reflection in the water. She recalls a similar request of years ago when a jewel was taken to the dragon palace under the sea. The chorus sings of the full moon and high tide, and the diver gladly cutting the seaweed.
4. Shite’s narration: Under the courtier’s questioning, the woman tells more of the diver who retrieved the jewel. It was called the “jewel that never turns away” because of Buddha Shaka could be seen in it from all directions. The younger sister of Minister Finite had become the empress of the Chinese Emperor Kôso who had in return sent three treasures – two gongs and the jewel – to the Kôfuku-ji temple. But the jewel was appropriated by the Dragon Palace. The Minister then disguised himself, came to Shido Bay and took up with a diver with whom they had a son, the present Minister Fusazaki.
5. Kokata and Shite’s exclamation: Fusazaki reveals who he is and they are both astonished. He tells how he had once heard that his mother was of the Shido Bay seafolk. Though of lowly birth, he still has strong feelings for her and the chorus sings of his longing for her as they both shed tears. The chorus sings of bonds from past lives, and the mother not wishing to sully the Minister’s great name.
6. Shite’s dance narration: The woman tells how the Minister promised that her son would be his heir if she retrieved the jewel. So she wrapped a rope around her and leaped into the sea. At the bottom, she saw the magnificent palace guarded by the dragon kings, rushed inside, grabbed the jewel, then cut herself open with a dagger and placed the jewel inside her breast. Since dragons abhor a corpse, they did not approach so she was pulled untouched to the surface.
7. Shite’s departure: The woman tells further how the diver’s body was broken and bloodied but she whispered to the Minister who found the jewel hidden under her breast enabling her son to become the Minister’s heir. The woman then reveals that she is in fact is that diver’s ghost. The chorus sings as she hands him her fan representing a letter. As the daybreaks, she slips into the morning tide.
8. Ai narration and announcement: A villager tells the story in detail. The courtier asks the villager to announce that a prayer ceremony is to be held for the Minister’s mother and that for seven days all nets are to be removed from the sea. The villager announces this.
9. Kokata’s wait: The Minister reads his mother’s asking him to lead her to the light. The chorus sings of the offering to be made at the temple for the mother’s repose.
10. Nichijite entrance: The dragon princess enters to deha music holding a sutra scroll and gives thanks for the reading of the sutra. The Chorus sings of how Buddha illumines the world striking all beings with awe. She gives the scroll to Fusazaki and dances hayamai.
11. Conclusion: The chorus sings of the Lotus Sutra’s power and how the Shido temple is a holy spot where the Buddha’s word lives thanks to a son’s love. [Richard Emmert]